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ABSTRACT

Noting that reading development is a crucial factor in breaking down social, intellectual, and political barriers, this paper uses Nigeria as an example of a developing multilingual country in order to examine the problems and challenges that learners and educators in multilingual societies face. The discussion is focused on children at the primary school level who use one or two languages at home and in the community and have to learn and use another at school. Information is provided on (1) multilingualism in Sub-Sahara Africa, (2) reading development and multilingualism, (3) practice and problems in reading development in Nigeria, and (4) implications for global development. The paper notes the need for more printed material in all languages of the region--the indigenous languages as well as the official language. (MKM)

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MULTILINGUALISM AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: (THE FATE OF THE CHILD IN A DEVELOPING COUNTRY).

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MULTILINGUALISM AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
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When the conference theme "Education for Global Development: towards a humane quality of Life" is interpreted to mean education for the total development of each individual around the globe rather than education for world development, we come face to face with the need to have among our terminal educational objectives effective interpersonal communication and effective cross-cultural communication. The successful achievement of these objectives requires of educators, a high level of commitment to a careful and systematic programme for the development of the communication skills of listening and reading, speaking and writing. It must aim at educating all learners beyond the standard acceptable for functional literacy and that required for linguistic competence to the level of communicative competence.

Indications are that countries around the world regardless of political ideology, technological development, or economic power, recognise the vital role of education in their economic and political advancement. Each one, in its own unique way tends to subscribe to the view that the barriers which separate groups within their societies ought to be broken down and that adequate social and educational opportunities should be made

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available to everyone. Among the innumerable barriers that divide people are those of social class, age, religion, language and the ability to read. These observable barriers are but indicators of that general inability to communicate.

The communication skills provide the foundation for educational achievement. Their development must not be left to chance.

This paper discusses reading development as a crucial factor in the breaking down of social, intellectual and political barriers. It examines the problems and challenges which learners and educators in multilingual societies face, and using Nigeria as an example of a developing country that is multi-lingual in character, it makes a critical analysis of the fate of the child in terms of educational opportunities and reading growth.

The discussion is limited to children at the primary school age level who use one or two languages at home and in the community and have to cope with another at school. Specifically, the paper discusses the following points:-

1. Multilingualism in Sub-Sahara Africa.
2. Reading development and multi-lingualism.
3. Practice and problems in reading development in Nigeria.
4. Implications for global development.

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1. Multi-lingualism in Sub-Sahara Africa:

A study of the development of multilingualism in Sub-Sahara Africa suggests that ethnic groups of this linguistically diverse geographic entity, speaking approximately 2,000 languages (Smock & Bentsi-Enchill 1976) felt the need to communicate across linguistic boundaries for the purposes of trade. They were therefore compelled to accommodate their trading partners by learning their languages. These communication patterns were rearranged dramatically when the colonial powers took over since

> "Each . . . sought to impose its own language as a second language on its colonies' educated elite . . . to permit communication between the colonial administration and the local population, to facilitate communication among the various linguistic communities within the country, and to serve as a carrier of the particular brand of European culture the colonial power was seeking to disseminate. (Smock & Bentsi Enchill p.161).

Independent African governments have also, by their language and educational policies, contributed to the rearrangement of

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communication patterns, because, like their colonial masters who preceded them, they realise the importance of language and communication in national development and cohesion.

The present situation as it exists in Nigeria and in most of the other countries in the sub-continent is that there is a language of instruction and administration -- an official language.-- which is usually referred to as the second language. In countries like Ghana, Nigeria and the Cameroons, this language is still that of the ex-colonial powers, whereas in places like Kenya and Tanzania, an African language is used as the linguas franca.

Where this official second language has been introduced into the community through formal instruction, it is, technically, outside the reach of the unschooled, and therefore tends to have restricted use.

An examination of the role of English in Nigeria, for example, suggests that lingua-franca though it might officially be designated, the extent of its use varies according to the functions which its users are called upon to perform within the body politic (Ubahakwe 1980;James 1979). The widespread use of Nigerian Pidgin which has evolved as a lingua-franca in Southern Nigeria effectively fills at grassroots level, the accommodative role which English is officially designed to play

(Banjo, 1976). So widespread is its use, that Pidgin has now become for some Nigerians a mother tongue (Mafeni 1971).

This kind of linguistic environment produces children who require the use of three or four languages for effective functioning within the society.

The following pattern is typical of the Nigerian multilingual in the Southern States:

	Language	Repository/ Source.	Example	
			Child 1	Child 2
L_1	Language of the home	Parents' ethnic group.	Igbo	Efik
L_c	Language of the community.	ethnic group in the locality of the child's residence.	Yoruba	Ikwere
L_t	Language of trade and commerce.	Peoples' lingua-franca.	Pidgin	Pidgin
L_2	Language of the school and of administration.	Official Lingua-franca.	English	English

Child 1 will have to communicate in Igbo, Yoruba Pidgin and English and child 2 in Efik, Ikwere, Pidgin and English.

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What happens to a child who lives in Ibadan, for example, where schooling takes place in Yoruba for the first three years, is that his introduction to print is more than likely to be in Yoruba, after which time he is given his instruction in English. He might, in fact, never have an opportunity to read in his own mother tongue.

Sociolinguistic studies a bilingualism have "highlighted the need to allow time for the acquisition of "basic" language, more often the mother tongue". (Marinho 1980) and psycho-linguistic studies, and studies in reading have stressed the value of learning to read in the mother tongue. (Goodman 1968 Smith 1971, etc.). The implications of this for second language learning in particular and for education in general, are immense.

3. The Process of Reading Development in a Multi-Lingual Society:

3.1. Psycholinguistic process.

Psycholinguistic research into reading suggests that learning to read is a developmental task - a function of physiological growth which occurs naturally in the timetable of growth in much the same way as learning to talk to walk, or to attain independence in basic motor skills. (Smith 1971,

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Koler 1975, Goodman 1975). The rate of growth, however, and the level of success depends very much on the support the learner receives from the immediate environment (Bruner 1971; Torrey 1973). Torrey's case study of the five year boy whose ability to read and write was attributed to his interest in television commercials, highlights the importance of concentration and listening as prerequisites for learning to read. It also lends support to the learning theories that advocate the simultaneous processing of visual and auditory stimuli and the need for the learner to have a minimum competence in the language of instruction and a familiarity with the stimuli being presented to him. The reading growth of Torrey's self-taught subject was not adversely affected by the phonological differences between his own dialect of English and the standard used on the television. What seemed more important was that the boy was in possession of the receptive language skills of listening and viewing.

Koler (1973) who did most of his work with bilinguals, traces reading development through three stages:- The first stage is that at which the learners' recognition of words has a limited dependence on letter recognition or discrimination - This he refers to as the visual operation stage. The second

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stage is the one in which he becomes sensitive to the grammar of the language and the reader processes words in relation to other words in the sentences. It means, therefore, that the reader at this stage is heavily dependent on his knowledge of the grammatical structure of the language in order to predict the sequence of words in a given sentence. At the third stage of one's reading development, the reader is more sensitive to meanings and relationships than to words: Koler explains that words are perceived and remembered preferentially in terms of their meaning rather than for their appearance or sound.

These stages of reading development seem to be universal and to be the same for monolinguals as for bilinguals. Again, it is clear that effective development can only take place when the learner has the necessary language background.

The implication of this theory for Nigerian bilinguals and bi-dialectals is that the rate at which they can pass through these stages of reading development will be in direct relationship to their exposure to print in any language, the expressive skills of which they already possess. This exposure should be given to them as soon as they have reached that readiness stage in their intellectual development.

We can now turn from the psycholinguistic basis of reading development to the pedagogical basis of reading development.

3.2 Reading Instruction:

The learner's earliest preparation for reading takes place in the home where language development begins and takes form. Here the learner's initial attitude to books and reading is formed.

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This early exposure enables young children to value reading for the pleasure it affords them as they listen and react to the stories read to them, or as they see others around them engaged in the reading activity. At this early stage, the parents and adults in the home who read for the children should also make books, and other types of print and audio media available to them. Children who are deprived of this informal exposure to the world of books usually have to depend on the formal school situation to shape their attitude towards books and reading. Well-informed parents who live in a predominantly literate society provide their children with this kind of exposure but these parents are in the minority.

This kind of environmental exposure enables children to get meaning from spoken language, and to recognise at an early age that there is a close relationship between the print on the page, spoken language, and meaning - an ability which is basic to success in reading and writing in school. In other words, they have been helped to the readiness stage for beginning reading.

On the other hand, the children of parents who are not literate, who are less well-informed, or who have little access to books, are deprived of this early exposure and begin their school career at a disadvantage.

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This pre-school experience is virtually impossible in a multi-lingual environment in which the language of the home is different from that in the books available. (We will return to this point later.) What it means, therefore, is that for the vast majority of children, the preparation for reading as well as the early introduction into formal reading has to be done by the school.

But for the school to achieve maximum success with these children it must be able to provide all of them with reading materials, the content of which represents sounds and structures of their own speech. This is not always possible. Take, for example, the situation of the bilingual child mentioned above. His own language is Igbo but the first books to which he will be exposed, provided there is no pre-school intervention, will be in Yoruba. In remote schools in some States, the first introduction to print will be in English. These children therefore begin with a handicap and many of them are known to drop out of school. (Yoloye 1980, Calcolt 1967, Okedara 1976).

4. Practice and Problems in Reading Development in Nigeria:

4.1 Reading Programmes:

The study of the Language Arts in general, and of Reading in particular is relatively new in Nigeria and so very little

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study has been done on the problems encountered by Nigerian children at the initial and primary reading stages. Most of the investigations carried out so far have tended to concentrate on reading difficulties of undergraduates (McKillop & Yoloye 1962, Chapman-Taylor 1965; Unoh 1975). The findings of these researchers that undergraduates have a number of identifiable reading problems, as well as similar findings about the reading of secondary school children (Unoh 1977) are among the factors that have made professional educators and academics concede, if cautiously, that the study of Reading and its methodology are worthy of serious academic attention. It is this lukewarm attitude towards this discipline that Unoh (1980) is referring to when he talks about "the myopic view of some academics who are cynical about any academic programme that is new, innovative, or relatively unfamiliar."

The communication-centered, problem-oriented study of language, which is what the Language Arts is all about, allows for the study of all the communication skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening in any language. It therefore encourages scholars to examine and give direction on methodology and on programmes for the teaching of these skills. This is what is needed if communicative competence is the ultimate goal, and it should be tackled at all levels of the education system.

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Unoh (1975) reminds us that learning through the medium of a second language is an enormous task and in a country like Nigeria where educational facilities are grossly inadequate there are bound to be some pupils who are not getting as much help as they need; Reading programmes and the diagnostic techniques can help in identifying and remedying their problems. Unless reading skills are identified and taught, he said, there is bound to be much educational wastage and underachievement.

Fortunately, there are signs of a growing interest in the study of the reading and language skills of primary school children. For example, Johnson's current study of the linguistic awareness and the acquisition of reading ability should, when completed, yield interesting information. Other studies on methodology include Olajubu (1980) who is critical of the use of the sentence method approach to the teaching of reading which is used in many of the older Yoruba primers for teaching beginners to read Yoruba. He recommends instead, the phonic approach. Johnson (1980), on the other hand, calls into question the use of phonics to teach initial reading in English to Nigerian children and makes a case for the use of the language experience approach. Surveys have also yielded evidence which suggests that primary school leavers tend to be functionally more literate

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in English, their second language, than in their local language (Adeniran & Unoh 1975; Azuokwu 1980; Akinmola 1980). Akinmola's case studies also revealed that the five primary school children encountered the same types of reading problems noted by Unoh in his work with secondary students and undergraduates.

Another area in which investigation has recently been conducted is that of the reading interests and language habits of primary school children. James (1980), using a sample of 379 subjects, investigated the children's use of the indigenous language as against their use of English and found that although English is widely used in some sections of the population, it tends to be used alongside rather than in place of the indigenous language.

The indigenous languages are very much used in the peer group even among those children who use both an indigenous language and English at home. It was also interesting to note that these same children expressed a preference for listening to stories in English, the second language. Teachers in school seem to cope with this bilingual situation by alternating between the use of the local language and English during story-telling periods.

Insufficient and tentative as these research findings are to date, it would appear that in the beginning reading stages

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in school, teachers do try to accommodate the use and transition from one language to the other but that a more systematic, planned follow up programme should be pursued to ensure the effective acquisition of the skills in both the first and the second languages.

4.2 Books and Library Facilities:

Children need books. In multi-lingual societies this calls for books in a number of indigenous languages as well as in the official second language. But book publishing has, for a long time, been a major problem. It is even more acute with publishing in the indigenous languages. Publishing is an economic venture and publishers are reluctant to invest large sums of money in books for which there is a restricted market, hence the international publishing houses find the prospects unattractive and local publishing houses find the venture too costly.

It is not surprising therefore that to date, almost all the books published in Nigeria are textbooks. This trend has been further encouraged by the language policy which requires that children be taught in their indigenous languages in the first three years of school, the inclusion of these languages in the secondary school syllabuses, and their introduction into the universities as academic subjects. The need thus created has given rise to a sizeable market for textbooks.

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The concentration on the publication of text books leaves very little opportunity for publishing or trade books for extensive reading. The acuteness of the shortage is felt most at the beginning reader level when mother tongue reading is the only kind of reading that children can do. The beginning reading stage is the one at which children are learning the joys of reading for pleasure at the same time as they are learning the skills. In the present Nigerian situation this opportunity for extensive reading is not available. (Wagner 1974; Oluwasanmi 1973; Odejide & James 1979).

Isolated attempts to provide facilities to fill the need have met with a measure of success but even here, the bulk of the material is intended for children who can read English rather than for those who have to operate in the indigenous language only. It is hoped that with the commitment of the state and federal governments to make library facilities available to all primary children, attention will be paid to the provision of beginner and easy story books in the indigenous languages. Even with the limited facilities, there is evidence that children tend to use the libraries for recreational reading goals more so than do adults who tend to use them for purposive reading. (Ogunsheye 1973).

The role of the library in Nigeria as a study area which

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compensates for the deficiencies in accommodation at home and at school, has been emphasized by Oddon (1953); Aradeon (1974), and Ningi (1978). But there is more to intellectual development than the provision of books, libraries, and teacher-librarians which has been the emphasis to date. It calls as well, for an emphasis on the teaching of reading and the other communication skills, and along with this, an intersive teacher preparation programme; it also calls for diagnostic and remediation facilities to be made available to all schools, and for trained personnel to be employed to man these. This will go a long way towards getting rid of the "reluctant reading syndrome" and the "higher illiteracy syndrome" of which Unoh (1980) speaks.

Learner needs and preferences:

Research findings suggest that inadequate reading skills and ineffective reading strategies are contributory factors in the high drop-out rates in schools and poor performance in the West African School Certificate and General School Certificate examinations. Unoh (1980) thinks that these inefficiencies can be traced to:

(a) failure to identify patterns and sources of learning difficulties,

(b) failure to remedy difficulties associated with the psycholinguistic processes involved in language learning and usage in both first and second languages.

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Another contributory factor, is a tendency to apply palliatives to the perceived needs of the learners without any regular assessment and reevaluation of these needs. The area of children's literature is a case in point.

Ever since the country's independence there has been a visible response to the call for more indigenous literature for Nigerian children but research into this has given rise to a number of questions. For example, are the books written at the appropriate reading level? Kalinda (1979) and James and Odejide (1980) find that the difficulty level of the books is high when compared with the students reading ability.

Another question that arises is whether the books being published deal with the literary genres that appeal to the children. An investigation into the borrowing patterns in three resource centres shows that children prefer real life stories to folktales, biographies etc. This finding was further supported by results of an interview conducted with 379 children who expressed an interest in reading about how people work and travel and about their towns and villages (James and Odejide 1979). A more recent study by these two investigators suggests that realistic stories are about 50 percent of the children's literature titles published for Nigerian children. Within this category, adventure books and school stories account for the largest number so that the children's interests are partly

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satisfied; there now seems to be a need for travel storis.

Folktales are also popular with Nigerian writers and forms about 25 percent of the Nigerian children's literature publications but it is not high up upon the lists of preferences among these children (Wagner 1974; James and Odejide 1980). On the other hand there is a dearth of myths, legends and fables in the traditional genre.

Another research finding that should be mentioned here is the children's stated preference for reading for themselves rather than have someone else read to them. (James & Odejide 1979). This view was expressed by children who could not read as well as by those who could. It should therefore be seen as an important call for help.

Implications for Global Development:

A multilingual society is a microcosm -- the world in miniature -- with all its diversity of people, of cultures of needs. The problems of communication, therefore, are similar to those in the world at large, hence the importance of finding a formula for coping with them. For children in this kind of environment, the language learning demands are greater than on children in monolingual societies since they often have to cope with as many as four languages before they can hope to derive maximum benefit from the educational opportunities open to them.

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Because in many instances the mother tongue of these children has no written form, or because it is uneconomical for publishers to print books in various languages, the majority of children are deprived of an early exposure to books. Added to this, when they finally enter the formal school system there is no guarantee that their exposure will be the sort that will inculcate in them positive attitudes to reading and to learning in general.

The problem is one that should be tackled from a number of angles - improved facilities, publication of a variety of books in a variety of languages, training of personnel, provision of resource centres. But in developing countries funds available for educational development are often limited, since there are many other pressing needs and they must tailor their coats to suit their budgets. If education for the total development of each child is seen as vital to the achievement of development, these countries' education, research and development programmes should be considered on the priority list for international support.

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